

Churches call pastors to facilitate the development of the ministry and mission of the church and its members. The search is for a pastor who brings the specific skills of preaching, teaching, communication, healing, counseling, administration and a personal commitment that will enable the church to carry out the mission to which God has called it.

History and Background

The Bible is full of stories of people called to particular forms of ministry. From the earliest days of the church there have been persons called out of the worshiping community for the purpose of performing specific tasks related to the well-being of that community. In their ordained ministry, these people bring to churches their extension of the ministry of Jesus and their commitment to help others carry out that ministry.

Pastors are called to a church because the church and the pastor feel that God is calling them to share ministry in that time and place.

In the United Church of Christ the process of searching for a pastor involves the local church and the association or conference. The church negotiates directly with candidates for the position, using profiles provided through the Parish Life and Leadership Team of Local Church Ministries.

Churches rarely think about the process of searching for a pastor until they are required to do so by an announcement that "at our next board meeting I am submitting my resignation." That kind of startling statement is the beginning of a process that probably will take several months and may take a year: the search for a pastor.

Common Practices

It is true that every church is different and has different requirements, but there are tested procedures that can make your search less painful than it might be otherwise. The procedures used by many churches in the United Church of Christ are outlined in **A Local Church Seeks a Pastor**, published by Parish Life and Leadership. It is available in your conference through your association or conference placement staff person. You are encouraged to contact that person immediately following the resignation of the pastor to learn of procedures that your association or conference recommends.

When churches try to go it alone, they often settle for a pastor who is nearby and known but not necessarily well suited for the mission of that church. Working with a person familiar with the placement system of the United Church of Christ will give your church confidence that you will find a pastor and you won't feel so deserted. It will also probably help you find an interim pastor who can

serve between the time your former pastor leaves and the new pastor arrives.

Responsibilities

Usually the governing board of the church receives the resignation of the pastor and assumes responsibility on behalf of the congregation for the search process. It appoints a search committee that carries out the search. If the search is for an associate pastor, many of the same procedures are used. The resource **Calling an Additional Member to the Pastoral Staff**, published by Parish Life and Leadership, is helpful when calling an associate pastor. In addition, you will need clarity about the role of the senior pastor and how to involve him or her in the search process.

Governing Board

Usually the governing board is responsible for:

- Accepting the pastor's resignation.
- Notifying the congregation of the resignation.
- Contacting the conference or association placement office.
- Meeting with the appropriate conference staff person.
- Establishing a special relationship with the resigning pastor.
- Making interim plans.
- Preparing a local church profile that describes the church and is the basis of decisions about what type of leader is desired.

- Appointing a search committee.
- Establishing an affirmative action policy.
- Determining salary and benefits for the new pastor.
- Following the search committee's choice of a top candidate, recommending the candidate to the congregation by letter jointly with the search committee.
- Planning for the time the candidate will be in the community to meet members and lead worship.
- Holding a meeting in which the congregation can vote to accept or reject the candidate.
- Sending a formal call to the candidate.

Search Committee

Usually the search committee is responsible for:

- Selecting a chairperson and a secretary.
- Agreeing on basic understandings.
- Meeting with the appropriate conference staff person.
- Sending an informative letter to every household in the congregation.
- Carefully studying the congregational profile.
- Asking the governing board for a preliminary determination of salary and benefits.
- Setting a cut off date for receiving ministerial profiles.
- Keeping the congregation informed about its progress. There is a chart

in **A Local Church Seeks a Pastor** that can help keep progress visually before the congregation.

- Asking each member of the committee to read every profile.
- Eliminating as many candidates as possible by a unanimous decision.
- Writing a letter to each candidate whom you are no longer considering.
- Sending each remaining candidate the church's profile.
- Eliminating from the list any candidate no longer interested.
- Determining the agenda for interviews with candidates.
- Selecting several candidates to interview.
- Calling the top candidates and telling them they are still being considered.
- Scheduling interviews.
- Ranking the Candidates interviewed.
- Selecting the top candidate.
- Assembling all available data and reports concerning the top candidate.
- Providing the data on the top candidate to the governing board.
- Recommending the candidate to the congregation by letter jointly with the governing board.
- Scheduling a time for the candidate to lead worship and meet members of the congregation and for a congregational vote to take place.
- Introducing the candidate to the governing board.

- Encouraging the congregation to meet the candidate when she or he leads worship.
- If the candidate is rejected, selecting another candidate.
- If the candidate is accepted and accepts the call, notifying all other candidates that the church has called a new pastor.

Shared Responsibilities

If the candidate accepts the call, there are responsibilities that may be shared by the governing board and search committee or divided between them. You will need to decide who is responsible for:

- Notifying the congregation that the call has been accepted.
- Notifying the association or conference staff person you have been working with that the call has been accepted.
- Preparing for the arrival of your new pastor.
- Introducing the new pastor to the community.
- Welcoming every member of the new pastor's family.
- Forming a pastoral relations committee See **The Pastoral Relations Committee**, a booklet from Parish Life and Leadership. Order from United Church of Christ Resources. Telephone, toll-free, 800-537-3394.

- Making installation plans with the new pastor and the association.

Ways to Increase Skills, Knowledge and Effectiveness

- Learn how to hold a screening interview. Your association or conference staff contact person should have guidelines published by Parish Life and Leadership that will help you.
- Use **Calling an Additional Member to the Pastoral Staff**, from Parish Life and Leadership, when calling an associate pastor. Order from United Church of Christ Resources, 800-537-3394
- Learn about interim ministry by talking to your conference staff.
- View the video "Sailing on Faith: Look Who God Sent" with your committee. Use the discussion resource to help expand the ways in which your search committee might read and review ministerial profiles, and help you discern who God may be calling to your setting for ministry. The video is available through your conference or association in DVD and VHS formats.
- In the process of your search, use "Biblical Resources for Search Committees: Update" available for download at www.ucc.org/ministers or from your conference

or association. This resource will guide your search committee to use a scripturally-based process as you affirm that God is an active part of the search process.

- Talk to search committees in other churches that have recently called a pastor. Find out what helped and what hindered their process.
- Use all available services offered by placement staff from your conference or association. They will probably recommend using **A Local Church Seeks a Pastor**, from Parish Life and Leadership. Order from United Church of Christ Resources.
- Check out questions of standing or ordination in **Manual on Ministry: Perspectives and Procedures for Ecclesiastical Authorization of Ministry**. Ask your conference or association placement officer to see a copy or order from United Church of Christ Resources 800-537-3394. The manual is also available at www.ucc.org/ministers/manual.

Issues Facing the Church

- Churches maintain that they want the best person possible as their pastor. Then they don't seriously consider women, persons with disabilities, old or young persons or persons who are of a different race. How can you establish a policy that will enable your church to be just

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and open in its search and will help you find the person God is calling to serve in ministry with you?

- Not all churches or pastors are prepared for a full-time relationship. What could be the role of "tent-making" or bi-vocational ministries in your church setting?
- When other members of the staff are called, such as a director of Christian education, there is a question about whether the same procedures should be used. What do you think and why?

Questions

- What is your church's position on affirmative action? Does it need attention?
- Who is the conference placement minister who would help your church?
- How can you make arrangements for an interim between long-term pastors?